

Endless Question: Youth Becomings and the Anti-Crisis of Kids in Global Japan

by

Dwayne Emil Dixon

Department of Cultural Anthropology
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

Diane M. Nelson, Supervisor

Leo Ching

Mark Driscoll

John L. Jackson

Rebecca L. Stein

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Cultural Anthropology
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ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how young people in Tokyo, Japan use city space, media, and body practices to create flexible, meaningful sociality. It focuses on skateboarders, *kikokushijo* (children returning to Japan) in an English cram school, and contingent workers in media and design. Via the online digital publishing platform Scalar it offers an inter-textual ethnographic account combining video, images, and text.

Youth, as a lived experience and a social event, endures within anthropology as an endless question—an opening into times and spaces in which transformations and becoming shape the possibilities of future selves. As such, youth is a period of risk and social instability often exacerbated by larger structural forces. While Japan's economy offers fewer stable jobs, especially to the young, and the birthrate continues to decline, this dissertation argues against the templates of crisis and precariousness often deployed to analytically frame contemporary Japanese youth. Instead, through the sociality and practices revealed in the varied, urban lives of young people at the center of this project, I trace a history of contested social categories around gender, labor, and Japanese identity. While intensively situated in local spaces, these young people are modulating Japanese identity through relationships connecting them to forms of national and regional difference from Okinawa to Brazil and across the Pacific Rim. Beyond these embodied connections they also inhabit intersections of global youth imaginaries comprised of media, virtual relations, and physical memories of other places that impact their everyday conceptions of the future,

kinship, and pluralized identities. The project articulates Japan's pre-war history of national policies on youth, education and delinquency with post-war reconstruction and with the present moment where "youth" itself is a flexible set of identities, reimagining meaning, affect, and social relations. Specifically, I examine how these young people redefine youth through bodily practices, identities, and economic de/attachments. The skaters' embodied actions distribute/dissipate their energies in risky ways outside formal structures of labor while improvising with the meanings of masculinity and space within a global youth imaginary. The *kikokushijo* children, with their bi-cultural fluency produced in circuits of capitalist labor, offer a desirable image of a flexible Japanese future while their heterogeneous identities seem to threaten the present. The creative workers are positioned as contingent, "affective labor" within transglobal cultural production, working to generate visual and textual content amid constant stressful uncertainties. All three groups share uneasy ground with capitalist practices, risky social identities, and, crucially, intimate relations with city space.

The dissertation itself is electronic and non-linear; a formal enactment of the drifting contact between forms of youth. It opens up lines of connection between questions, sites, events, theories, and bodies. The form attempts a polyvocal unfolding of affect, imagination, and experience to tell stories about embodiment in urban space and the global dreams of young people inhabiting a city along the Pacific Rim. It asks if the affective, embodied, and mediated forms taken up by Japanese youth are

possible strategies to transform the risks of uncertain futures defined by crisis into the open possibilities of becoming.

Dedication

This dissertation, always an incompleteness and an opening, is dedicated to Hong-An Truong. Her endless patience, searching intellect, and fierce, unrestrained love have buoyed me, salvaged me, and strengthened me to go out into the world and come home again.

My small labor here in this dissertation is also dedicated to the memories of Emily Melia Grigg-Saito and Anthony Truong.

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There is labor here. Distress, uncertainty, and the tensions of something glimpsed and things fading from sight. The value of this project is not in what it contains through my own small attempts to encounter, experience, think, write, and design. It is in the love and care given on the journey this project represents. These gifts are always present, carrying up every line, arcing through every moment, reaching out beyond the considerable limits of my own expressive powers, writerly skill, and intellectual grasp. This is the small allotment to stack stones in gratitude, the names of those who have given so selflessly, tirelessly, generously, and with love.

This moment would have been forfeit long ago but for the love of Hong-An Truong. She never let go, nor let me go. She is always going into the dangerous space, where things become anew even as we touch the loss of what was. I have only found my way on this journey because of her. She has healed, fought, searched, and loved so softly, so fiercely, so carefully, so endlessly. It is because of her this project finds an end.

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- - -

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My dissertation committee has been a motley cabal, always ready to receive my ideas, my ambitions, and my erratic offerings. Without hesitation they have encouraged the experimental over the familiar, the risk that spreads the wreckage of convention. They have been tireless in their support and unbridled in their enthusiasm and efforts on behalf of this project. I am humbled by their unwavering dedication and belief in my potential and that of my dissertation. Rebecca Stein has been faithful in her counsel and incisive in her readings. Leo Ching has drawn me into a vibrant community of scholars, given me numerous opportunities to refine my pedagogical skills, and has had my back from my very first days of grad school. He trusted me unquestioningly and has always been vocal and adamant about the worth of this

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- - -

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Preface

Diagnosing Place: Walking through the skin of another life

*Tonight I want to say something wonderful
for the sleepwalkers who have so much faith
in their legs, so much faith in the invisible*

from "For the Sleepwalkers"

Edward Hirsch

Hirsch continues, a few lines later "I love the way that sleepwalkers are willing, to step out of their bodies into the night, to raise their arms and welcome the darkness, Palming the blank spaces, touching everything." He describes contact twice over, an image of extended hands, reaching out in, into the dark. The willingness to reach is an unconscious state where the haptic rises to find a profound frontier in communion-contact with the irrational. This nonsensical unknowingness is transformed into bodily understanding where the *out there* is known by someone else and at the same time is always only a membrane—a skin over chaos.

We have to learn the desperate faith of sleep-
walkers who rise out of their calm beds

and walk through the skin of another life.
We have to drink the stupefying cup of darkness
and wake up to ourselves, nourished and surprised.

Anthropology often requires for the practitioner and student the "desperate faith" of those who "rise out of their calm beds" of what is supposed, formulated from thorough study of

the extant literature, carefully theorized and then, rising, go into the field where the stupefying cup of darkness awaits. This “field”—the dense, lively, and densely lived environments of my anthropological project—is just a crazy thicket of overgrown stretches that seem to both begin at and recede into the carefully tended plots of area studies, capitalism(s) and its (in)congruent and noisy neighbor, globalization, visual culture, and maybe most eerily, the wild edges of orderly scholarly villages where childhood and youthfulness flourish. The “field” is ostensibly Japan, in its broad historical and cultural topographies, but it is also Japanese youth, or to cut this closer, Japan and youth appended (apprehended) by urban spaces, body practices, labor, education, and visual technologies amidst global flow. “Japan” as an object is a complex figure mapped by those who have traversed its cultural specificities and global fault lines and transected the historical and theoretical strata for a refinement of “Japan” as knowledge resource. This ethnography is another encounter, following the maps of those who precede me, but an encounter disconcerted in finding the maps coming loose at the edges of the world, unable to beam out trajectories into conceptual space or auger the depths of spatialized bodies. This ethnography is an attempt to finger loose from the small crevices of memory, from the fine fissures of experience, an account, a sounding, an opening up into open temporalities. It is trying to learn the gait of the sleepwalker and the possessed and thus to “walk through the skin of another life.” This requires one to still be intact within one’s own skin and aware of its solidity and porosity and its ever-present capacity to let you down and go down hard. This sense is invaluable and as I encounter the skins of other lives throughout this ethnography, I will constantly be

noticing the parameters of my own—male, white, clutching a U.S. passport against my better judgment.

The Project Cartography

This project examines how young people in Tokyo enliven their local situations with global subjectivities and energetically deploy these youthful subjectivities in spaces of school, play, and work. Their experiences are comprised of folded, drifting layers of language, spatial use and meaning, body practice, and visual culture. These experiences move at speeds of the body cross-cut with speeds of trains, skateboards, computer processes, cell phone texts, internet connections, video cameras replaying footage, classroom periods, job interviews, and shifts at a hostess club and convenience store. All these speeds shift with different intensities while globalized inflections connect them to diffuse (dis)locations of social relations even as they are engaged in the immediacy of schoolwork, design jobs, and skateboard tricks intended for a clothing advertisement. The young people range in age from ten years old to their mid-thirties. They are returnee children (*kikokushijo*) who have lived abroad and are studying at an English-language cram school, skateboarders in western Tokyo, and creative workers scattered around the city.

Through a survey of Western theorizations on children, anthropological studies of young people situated across periods of global contact, and histories of youth in Japan this project brings contemporary experiences of young people in Tokyo into focus. Understanding the production of social change through capitalist relations positions the figure of the child in present society. Viewing Tokyo as a node along rhizomatic urban

clusters encircling the Pacific Rim and stretching across the world destabilizes an essentialized national conception of these young people. Analyzing the various ways media generate links to other spaces, both remembered and imagined, and amplify experiences of space and the body in the immediate, the simultaneously haptic and technologized conception of an authentic, globally situated subjectivity comes into view. Tracing how young people affectively, emotionally, and imaginatively engage with one another, urban space, their bodies, and sites of work and study shapes, albeit provisionally, the tenuous, transitory, and mutable micro-exchanges from which everyday relations are assembled.

Young people are framed through their practices such as skateboarding, their formal institutional positions as students, and their work along the often contingent, part-time seams of cultural relations and production. The category of youth is dismantled into political, historical, and cultural fragments from which flexible and multiply inhabited forms of youth are composed.

Naming Youth

As such there is a persistent and productive slippage throughout this project between the terms *youth*, *young people*, *children*, and *kids*. “Youth” often denotes a category of people but also communities of shared belonging, interests, and practices. I use “young people” as the broadest term of inclusion for roles and identities demarcated from maturity as achieved through the twin signs of social arrival: permanent, legitimate/legitimizing work and incorporation into and continuation of a family unit. “Children” and “child” most frequently refer to discursive subjects though sometimes are

used directly to speak of elementary and middle school students. Though the subjects range widely in biological age, they share three significant traits: they are all connected to a global youth imaginary of images, media texts, narratives, styles, aesthetic and visual languages, and urban life. They are discursively apprehended as figures at risk and part of a population made legible primarily through its incoherence within traditional expectations of transition to adulthood and instead appears precarious for many reasons—malformed Japanese identity, lack of reproductive inclination or possibility, inclusion within a growing labor pool of temporary workers. And, from the viewpoint of the Japanese state, they all came of age after the major economic collapse in the early 1990s. In 1991 in a government policy paper considering the “*furittaa* situation,” or the situation of part-time workers, the age of youth was expanded to 35. The rise in the age of the youth category served a two-fold purpose: it not only permitted government analysts and demographers to capture a wider portion of the working population within a growing sector of the labor force but it also coincided with a rise in the ages at which marriage was occurring (Kosugi 2008, 244). Thus, youth was both those who 1) weren’t working very much and 2) weren’t likely to be biologically (re)productive either.

Method and Theory

This demonstration of youth as a flexible, partly state-constructed category for measuring the risks and productivity of a population is a historical fold from which to investigate the construction of youth and its mobilizations as resource for future social reproduction and cultural continuity. Rather than thinking of youth itself as a stable category traversed and left behind by maturing/transitioning generations, I imagine youth

as a shape-shifting identity taken up and carried on by people within it, such that it expands and changes culturally, politically, and even bio-technically, while also producing the multiple affects, orientations, languages, and practices people themselves use strategically in articulating themselves to local sites of belonging and spaces of global imagination and play. Central to these ideas of change is Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *becoming* shaped particularly by Elizabeth Grosz's interpretations. Becoming informs analyses of the future and disrupts notions of youthful teleology directed towards the stability of society and state while at the same time contesting analytical models of youth predicated on crisis and situated within "panic sites" or zones of behavior, affect, and imagination coded as deviant or abnormal.

Youth is not reducible to terms of development, liminality, and transition. In its polytonality, its proliferating intensities, speeds, rhythms, connections, and energies, youth is a social field full of multiplicity. It ensnares all aspects of Japanese culture even as it fragments into a spectacular fractal projection. Youth skates across the seemingly solid surfaces of traditional institutions, social formations, and normative practices of the everyday. This psychedelic illumination is endless: it refracts backward off of Japanese histories of national schooling, juvenile policing, and popular anxieties coinciding with modernity. It spills out across the present in the sheer luminance of global experience, memory, and media and delicate play across small, prosaic moments of lived space and intimate relations. Youth endlessly radiates outward into lines describing shifting future topologies. It is at once a body and the environment, culture, and relations it inhabits, creates, and is affected by. The question is never closed and youth is never over. Through

the multiple forms, expressions, and articulations of youth with global Japanese subjectivities we might discover critical ways of thinking the changing interrelations of time, bodies, and space within a global city of the Pacific Rim.

Chapter One: Overview of the Project

Introduction

This dissertation is an experiment. It undertakes a study of three different groups of young people in Tokyo, Japan, over the course of two years. Though all three groups lived in Tokyo, their stories overlap unevenly and it is difficult to say they occupy the same site at any given moment as they are engaged differently with the floating, borderless world of media coming through the internet, their cell phones, their Nintendo DS consoles, the hazy layer of screens sparkling across the city, and they are differently engaged with the city itself. Their energy is focused on family, crappy jobs, educational demands, social obligations, persistent desires, and subtle anxieties. They are preoccupied by texting friends, finishing homework, finding the perfect spot to go film a trick on their skateboards, figuring out a way to get back to L.A.

The speeds, intensities, and locations of their lives shift while still holding them all within a broad social space of youth and in a vibrant assemblage of mundane activities intimately flowing into vast outerworlds of desires: a frisson of bodily movement and emotional arousal, physical stress and intellectual weariness. This confluence and unspooling of event and world is a beautiful chaos, one in which there is never a point of pure convergence or a horizon of perfect social and individual consonance. To tell these stories depends on deep passages of description to convey the richness of environments, interactions, tones, attitudes, and bodily sensations. It sometimes needs ethnographic video to show events edited into brief moments or constructed into experiments with

sound, archival footage, and self-conscious performances before and for the camera. In other moments it requires assessments of histories and encounters with theories and their own desires, locations, and energies.

So to tell a story of people living lives within the local specifics of Japan and along the remembered, anticipated and imagined trajectories of global possibility is to traverse many latitudes simultaneously, impossibly balanced between their drift and cohesion, their ruptures and failures. The stories come up short and the lives they describe outlive my attempted representations. The stories are always incomplete and are always open to new lines of intersection and new amalgams of feeling, sensation, desire, impulse, improvisation, constriction, and containment. Failure is the becoming of new contacts, new critiques, new awareness, new ways of thinking, speaking, knowing while remembering how these things got tangled together in the first place.

The Form of the Dissertation: Scalar

The index to this dissertation is a rough-hewn tabulation. It stacks the incidents of stories, histories and theories on top of one another. It is only a guide and a scrim. To fully explore the project requires a different medium than familiar linear accounts.

I have used Scalar, an online digital publishing platform developed by a team at the University of Southern California, to compose this dissertation. I use a mix of text and video throughout the dissertation, attempting to integrate them into compelling relations. In using Scalar as the form I hope to enliven the content and in turn, waken the techno-circuits of information to the play of reading across, down, into, and backwards.

Using Scalar as the form for this project is an invitation to create the conditions for a vision and then to reassemble the components and fragments into new configurations, making new connections and relations bright before they fade in another series of encounters with the different pages, paths, tags, and annotations where the stories await to unfold in multiple directions.

There is no right way forward and never a wrong move sideways. The form, while still unwieldy under my unskilled hands, is a beginning attempt to play with the space of anthropological knowledge making. It is static in increments, but mobile in its contacts. Each page contains a fixed body of text or a video but they allow you, the reader, to move off the trajectory frequently. Indeed, there is no single trajectory and as such, no single argument building to climax. Instead there is a rhizomatic multiplicity, where one aspect can be brought into contact with another unexpectedly, but productively. Reading the project then should be fun and permit polymorphous perversity. Though I only remind the reader again that this is an experiment and imperfect. But it is becoming and as such, I hope it echoes, amplifies, and even distorts the signals and stories it conveys.

Subject Populations, History, and Theory

The Scalar version of *Endless Question: Youth Becomings and the Anti-Crisis of Kids in Global Japan* has three central streams or lines of flight around the three subject groups: skateboarders, *kikokushijo* or returnee students at Kikokushijo Academy (K.A.), a cram school, and young designers, photographers, translators, stylists, and videographers who collectively constitute a group of creative workers exposed to economic uncertainty while generating the content for a global youth imaginary. The ages vary widely, from

the ten to fourteen year olds I taught at K.A. to a skateboarder and videographer who was in his early 30s. The fact of age variance is as necessary to the project as is the disparate life space of the subjects: biological age is only one feature of the social category young people occupy and it serves to enforce social boundaries, boundaries which are problematized and destabilized by the practices and subjectivities of the young people themselves.

This leads us to a second series of lines crossing through the project: understandings of youth. These portions engage with traditional anthropological models of kinship and studies of childhood and adolescence, queer mobilizations of the child as figure in literature and film, as well as Foucault's interventions into Western histories of the production of youth. There are also sections devoted to situating the contemporary lives studied in this project within a larger historical narrative of youth in Japan beginning during the Meiji Period of the late 1800s and onwards through the social contortions of capitalist and imperialist modernities, through the post-war and into the multilayered present. In reviewing these literatures attention is paid to representations of Japanese youth in popular literature, photography, documentaries, and media discourse. Central to all of these interrelated sections is an analysis of youth as panics and the figure of youth or the child within moral panics wherein young people are both seen as risky and at risk, threats and threatened.

A third substrate is composed of theoretical components, often linked explicitly to ethnographic passages or historical review. These theories provide context for thinking through globalization, capitalism, labor, Japanese identities, postmodernity, gender,

media and technology, body practices, space, and perhaps most crucially, concepts of becoming. At the interstices of self and society these theoretical discussions engage history and ethnography to provide a thoughtful assemblage and provoke new relations between spaces, regions, and temporalities of everyday life.

Finally are media nodes. These are clustered primarily along the rhizomatic tendrils related to skateboarding, where I used the camera the most and cameras were most often deployed. These nodes extend key sections combining ethnographic film history, particularly the work of Jean Rouch, reflexive use of technology in the field, and ethnographic observations and analysis of the way Japanese skateboarders encounter city space through their bodies, boards, and cameras to generate meaning and significance, both in the moment and in the visual artifacts produced.

Locating the Scalar Version of the Dissertation

To immediately move to the Scalar format, please refer to the Appendix to find the url or web address for the digital content of this dissertation.

Chapter Two: Details of Sections

Skateboarding, Youth, and Deviancy in the City

This section involves a survey of skateboarding's history on the West Coast, its relation to teen culture and the production of rebel identities. It offers an introduction to my own experience with skateboarding and the global relations it already promised. Understanding skateboarding or skating as a mobile practice contesting the intentions and meanings of built space as well as the fixity of bodies and their practices opens to Foucault's concept of heterotopia.

The paths are then devoted to a review of Japanese historical constructions of delinquency in the Meiji and Taisho Periods as Japan's imperial project began to take shape within a contested modernity. This section converges with a separate path exploring the riskiness of youth through the anthropological research of Margaret Mead and the theoretical framing of Western children undertaken by Foucault. This includes a page discussing the connection between the primitive and the child using Ann Stoler's reading of Foucault across Dutch colonial practices around the child.

A path then turns to explore Japanese family and the masculinity, particularly the post-war experience of manual laborers and their relation to contemporary notions of "precarious" labor. Through this portal the house where the Lesque skaters live becomes a central figure to examine family in the present moment. It asks who is permitted to have a family in the traditional sense, what the costs are for such choices, and how young men are creating meaning from homosocial relationships when other avenues are seemingly

foreclosed or uncertain. The nature of sociality and survival under a moment of economic uncertainty frames the ethnographic analysis of these young men's lives.

Ethnographic footage is linked across these pages and shows the interior of the house, the adjacent rice field, and the young skaters variously skating to work at a convenience store, cleaning the house, and one pro skater showing his scrapbook full of articles and advertisements in which he features.



Figure 1. Dead board stack in kitchen. Still. *Lesque House*. 2008.

A separate line of ethnographic inquiry explores the relationship between the skateboarders and media with specific attention to how their own videos and photographs are designed to circulate in a larger global culture of skateboarding and broader youth imaginaries. Questions of value, authenticity, risk, pleasure, and relations between body, space, and camera are examined. Videos are central to these paths and include footage of searching for spots, setting up lighting equipment, attempting tricks, being accosted by

businessmen and private security guards, and making a trick for a photographer and videographer. In one scene Itoshin, a pro skater, and a photographer, Ryo, are driving and checking Ryo's cell phone photo archive for likely places to shoot a trick for an upcoming advertisement for Elwood Clothing Company. In another scene Itoshin is in the middle of waxing a rough, banked wall in Kyoto where he hopes to land a trick. While waxing the bank, what looks to be a senior executive who works in the building begins to gruffly yell at Itoshin and the entire production is halted. Another scene shows Itoshin struggling to land a difficult trick in a no trespassing area beneath an elevated superhighway. All the scenes are analyzed for the relations visible articulated between the skaters and the city surfaces but also between photographers and videographers and moving bodies, as well as the people passing through the space, including those, like the executive and security guards, who make counter-claims against the skaters' interventions on use, intention, and possibility.



Figure 2. “I am creepy man.” Still. *Itoshin skates the System D building*, Kyoto. 2008.



Figure 3. Itoshin ollies while Koji videos. Still. *Noseblunt Slide*, Kyoto. 2008.

Affective Labor and Creative Work

This section is comprised of several paths examining the role of work in the lives of young people in the affective and creative fields. Links between their ethnographic stories are made to previous paths dealing with globalization while new analyses are added. The creative and decoding/translating work of these young people is offered as crucial evidence in how young people, already precariously positioned in regard to the larger economy and social demands for stability and productivity, are generating the very contacts and content necessary for the valorization of in which young people who work in temporary, part-time, or freelance jobs.

The role of gender in performing affective labor is examined through the working life of a young woman who has a part-time position at a hostess club. Issues of family, stability, social and biological reproduction are re-examined in relation to the study of male areas of precarious or contingent labor and the exclusionary zones of family they are exposed to. Intersecting paths guide the reader across these two streams, permitting a greater surface area of contact between the two different subject populations.

A theoretical path intersects here to review the literature on immaterial labor as proposed by the Italian Autonomist theorist, Maurizio Lazzarato, and the increasing turn to affective energies subsumed by capitalism in a marketplace increasingly desirous of sense, sensibility, emotion, feeling, and the ineffable conditions of style and aesthetic.

Globalized identities are also analyzed for their capacity to work at multiple cultural levels and as such represent a valuable resource to capitalist media production.

An ethnographic scene tackles this issue in which a stylist who lived in L.A. and is responsible for hiring white skateboarders to act as filler for a photo shoot featuring a Japanese pop star. This is followed by links connecting Ryo, the skate photographer, and Koji, the videographer and editor, into this discussion of global media production and identities enlivened and made vulnerable through the provisional nature of their creative work. The section argues the labor the three subjects are engaged in is vital to producing the “authentically coded” visual texts upon which a global youth imaginary comes into being.

The transnational experience of the stylist and Koji is connected to the translator for *Vice* Japan, Lena. She is a *kikokushijo* (the subject population discussed in the final section) and as such she lived in Sydney as a teenager and stayed in Australia after her parents moved back to Japan, finishing university there. Upon returning to Tokyo she struggled to find work and became one of the simultaneous interpreters for Tony Robbins, the motivational speaker. The work is intermittent so she also became the translator for *Vice* magazine, the international online and print periodical aimed primarily at a youth audience. Her position there is extremely provisional: she is understood as a necessary supplement to the more central work of editing and content-production the core staff is involved in. She describes facilitating a photo shoot in Harajuku for Terry Richardson in which Japanese volunteers are coerced, bullied and shouted at by Richardson and his crew of male “assistants.” Her own status becomes delicately liminal and she fades into the persona of the white American men she is interpreting for. Her

status is perilous and conflicted but necessary for the viability of the magazine as it seeks to cement its ties to the head office in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

An interlocking section features a struggling freelance graphic designer and her difficulty finding substantial work even as she refuses to participate in what she perceives as the artificiality of “human relations” or networking. Instead she pursues a strategy of connecting to people as friends first. The affective connections required of the hostess are relayed across the work of the stylist, photographer, videographer, translator and finally back to a young woman working out of her childhood bedroom on the edge of Tokyo, trying to make a space for herself on socially meaningful terms.

Kikokushijo: City Kids and Global Selves

This section focuses on Kikokushijo Academy, an after-school and weekend English-language *juku* or cram school where students who have lived and studied abroad (usually in English) come once or twice a week to maintain and improve their English language capability, primarily with the goal of passing English language entrance exams to elite schools. For two years I taught at the school and I focused my research on a group of eight ten to twelve year olds. The school, its students, and staff offer a site of intersectional play between circulating capitalism, national identities, performances of social achievement, and techniques for shaping the globalized child.

This subject group “kikokushijo” encompasses a broad cross-section of previously discussed identities. Skater/videographer Koji was born and raised in Costa Rica and went to university in Virginia. His Japanese identity is highly differentiated

from that of his peers. Among the creative workers many had lived and studied outside Japan. Their globalized sensibilities were both an advantage in jobs where an ability to decipher or decode the foreign for Japan was required. For some, like Lena, being *kikokushijo*, was central to her job but also restricted her to the periphery until the periphery was the critical seam or fault line in production. This section intersects often with previously discussed paths and the reader is invited to circulate between them. Because of the central role *kikokushijo* represent to the entirety of the dissertation, a central path revisits the construction of youth through discourse around liminality, economics, nation, and social reproduction.

In studying Japanese children identified as *kikokushijo* a scholarly gravity exerts a steady pull, drawing the class of child towards a diagnostic center and thereby providing the calculations necessary to determine the constitution, shape, character, etc of this exact *figure* of child. A pressure is exerted on the people-subjects under scrutiny, solidifying them into a hardened mass of Otherness. Like some alien planet, this Otherness casts its disordering, tidal shadow across an otherwise rhythmic social sea. The pull is towards expansive instrumentalization—broad use of kids as a sign of social disease—where the figure of the *kikokushijo* strictly frames the exact dimensions of institutional and policy shortcomings for society as a whole. It is the symptomatic child as shorthand and palimpsest for broader cultural diagnosis (and production of theory-therapies). An opposite pull reduces the class of child to a series of case studies to be flayed/filleted finely in order to produce cultural specimens of lived experience suitable for performing a biopsy on the class' specific weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Here the child is a

microscopic figure, a Foucauldian trace, intrinsically vulnerable because it lacks some fundamental auto-immunity to social disease and thus a figure of pathos.

This focus folds into a path constructed of ethnographic accounts of the affective work of teachers and the powerful imaginaries the children themselves carry with them as they attempt to adapt to the expectation that they be Japanese. Mami, who had lived in L.A., relentlessly consumed YouTube videos of her favorite American shows or put in a DVD of *Friends* in an attempt to soothe the disjuncture between her American sense of self and the demands of the Japan around her. This tension with a lived memory mapped onto a new urban space was especially etched into eleven year-old Emi's frightening, violent encounter as she was groped by an adult as she passed through the turnstiles at Shinjuku station where she was switching trains. The city became threatening. The man who assaulted her was not interested in her difference, but rather her interchangeability among other uniformed girls riding the trains. She described feeling herself singled out but also faceless, submerged into a vulnerable mass.

Mami told the other girls about how she once was lost because of an earthquake that caused her train to reroute. Her consternation and fear at feeling abandoned and trapped within Tokyo's transportation infrastructure contrasted to the smooth feelings she described cruising Los Angeles' highways in her parents' cars.

An experimental video is linked to this section while it also situated in the conclusion. In it, Mami is shown walking through her neighborhood from school and breaking into her own home. These scenes are intercut with post-war footage of Japanese children diligently learning to write in unison. Mami asks a question that is then looped,

“What is this place called?” She is referring to a local shrine. But the question also signals the anxiety and dislocation of these young people and their unique identities positioned on amidst worldwide changes in culture, economics, and family. They signal both the possibilities and risks of being young.



Figure 4. Still. *What is this Place Called.* 2010.

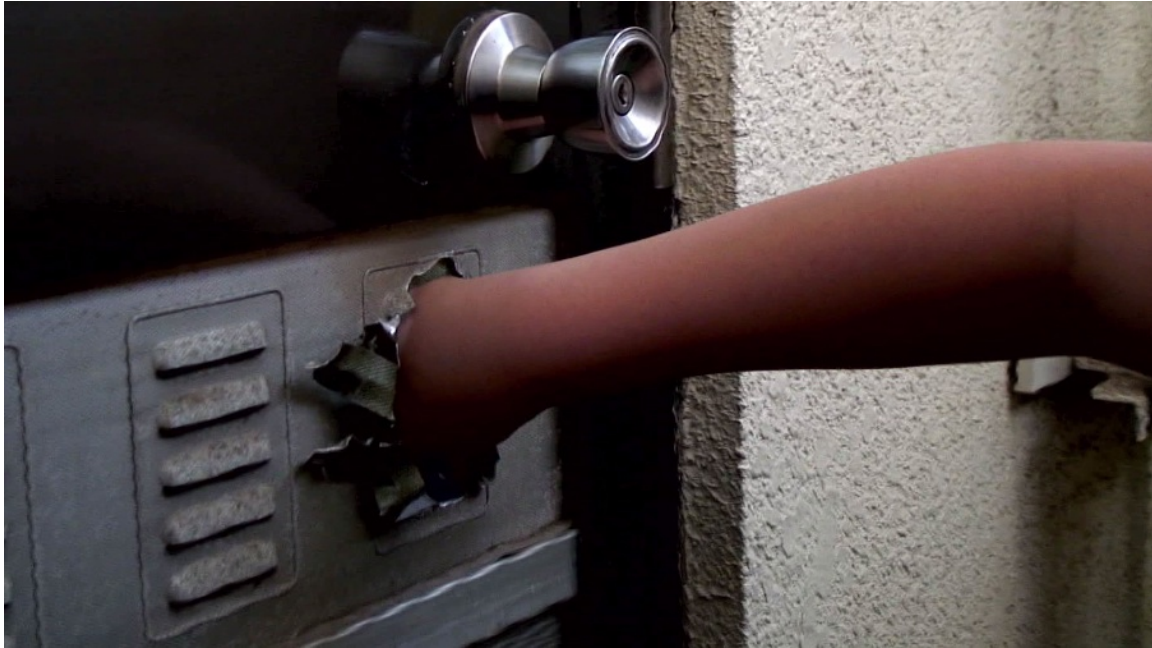


Figure 5. Still. *What is this Place Called.* 2010.



Figure 6. Still. *What is this Place Called.* 2010.

Conclusion

This project concludes with a video that is an experiment in ethnography. It is made using footage shot with Mami, twelve at the time, as we walked home from her elementary school on a Wednesday afternoon. She wanted to visit a nearby shrine, though as we climbed the steps to the sacred neighborhood site, she hardly seemed interested in the place itself, so enrapt was she in telling me about a kid in her class who made fun of her for not being to read Japanese fluently like her classmates. At the ablution basin or *chōzuya* we each sipped some water. It was a hot day and the climb up the steep, stone steps had made us sweat. The courtyard in front of the shrine was empty and quiet, a reminder of the shifting scales and relations of movement and stillness that inscribed Tokyo. Looking around, Mami said abruptly: “What is this place called?”

I was briefly confused. This shrine was on the route she walked every day. Shouldn’t the name of the shrine, at the very least, be familiar to her? It was a known landmark to her and was a notable, if not significant feature in her neighborhood geography.

Before I could say anything though, Mami suddenly pointed up at the paper talismans stuck to the posts and lintel of the shelter over the stone basin. “Can you read that?” Together we struggled to decipher the stylized kanji characters with little success. Our collaborative attempts at reading failed. The story Mami had just been telling me about her classmate’s ridicule of her literacy lingered and resituated itself.

“What is this place called?” lingered as a question both peculiarly revealing and prescient. The question shaded Mami’s experience with Tokyo, and Japan more broadly, a location she found difficult to calibrate herself to, in antagonism with her own sense of Otherness—either perceived, fantasized, or felt. But asking after the name of the place also seemed to imply something had changed in the place itself. The confusion I felt at Mami’s question might better be transferred to the entirety of the scene: she and I, unlikely duo, at this lonely shrine on a stultifying afternoon.

In such a mundane event there is a sudden gust of movements. There is the camera I am using as technological membrane and memory/memorializing device. There is this revered component of the Tokyo landscape. Then there are our bodies—young and not so young, biologically, students, studied and studier. Japanese and American, but mixed-up and in-between, speaking to one another in an argot we’ve created over the two years of our friendship. A fractal language of anthropologist and subject, a becoming-speech in which we ask questions about the place we are at. What is this place called?

It is changing, and us with it, and because of it, and becoming so that our relations to the place and one another are morphing. Indeed, they always have been. The question is not a symptom of the change. It is like the Cuna shaman for whom “chanting creates and occupies a strange position, inside and outside, part of, yet also observer of the scenes being sung into being” (Taussig 1003, 111). It is an event folding over such “that the self is no longer as clearly separable from its Alter” (Ibid., 252). It is not just about seeing where we are, and the boundaries between us, and the limits of our possibility to be in a space, to claim it and simultaneously be claimed by it. It is about contact—

through the internet, through bodies speeding and wrecking themselves on the city's surfaces, in Naoko rubbing Emi's back as she sobbed after being in violent contact with her male assailant. Affective contacts, cognitive contacts, bodies touching and being touched, language shared in close spaces, Tetsuya's uncanny presence at the DIY spot in Haneda, the unexpected contact with Saori on the train. Cultural contacts and relays; assemblages; rhizomes of relation, memory, feeling. And broken, failed contacts too, doing strange work. Hiroyuki's withdrawal, the girl in Emi and Naoko's *juku*, Emiko's pencil stabbing down, breaking the transmission relay connection with a force no longer repressed.

Looped, the question echoes. Asking what this place is called is also asking about what Mami is to call herself.

I've attempted to show throughout this project in its erratic geometries how youth is a diverse and unstable figure. It slips over borders and comes home again altered while still beguiling with its sameness. Youth continues to change across cultural practices and thresholds of being. Its very instability enlivens our awareness of larger cultural shifts coupled with transformations in environments and durations. In the cultural drift I describe in my history with Tetsuya there is a longitudinal perception of youth as changing within even as the term still defines Tetsuya in contrast to his co-workers and to generations of male labor that preceded him.

Systems of education and labor have attempted to discipline youth while capitalism has sought to commodify its energies, practices and desires. There persists an uncontainable heterogeneity, constantly diverging from the telos of successful transitions

into adulthood. The anxiety these heterogeneous divergences inspire is hardly new, nor even remarkable. Recognizing the anxiety is to understand it within a series of its own heterogeneous genealogies of panic and continuity through which the child (as a state of becoming) and youth (the category of social, political, technological, ethical, economic, and media becoming) (re)emerge and comeingle.

It is useful here to remember the counsel of the Dadaist Hülsebeck. The lives of young people, in Japan and across the Pacific Rim and beyond, are beset by modulations of the “social convulsions” of capital and intensified claims of the state in the face of regional drifts. Rather than seeking the hard lines of bright resistance, we can imagine that the Dadaist strategy of “let[ting] oneself be thrown by things” may be also be a youthful mode of becoming. Being thrown is evading the risk of sedimentation and thus a risk to one’s life. Like the spatial tactics of the skaters, being thrown may place the body into new lines of flight and open new instances where wreckage and disorder are manifest as native components in the assemblages of everyday lives. Youth is that way of rising up, recalling Hirsch’s sleepwalkers, out of their calm beds and walking “through the kin of another life.” Or many. Failure is not to be avoided while crisis is a tautological foreclosure of the endless question as a palimpsest of becoming: What is this place called?

This project has sought to take the various lives and the series of their events and worlds as lines “divergent; not relatively, in the sense that one could retrace one’s path and find a point of convergence, but absolutely divergent in the sense that the point or horizon of convergence lies in a chaos or is constantly displaced within that chaos”

(Deleuze 1987, 123). There is no hopeful horizon. Nor is there a truth to be discerned. Young people are living out youth beyond its years. It is a moment of transition fragmented into micro-temporalities where differences are always making new things happen.

The video also uses archival footage from a 1941 educational film, entitled “Children of Japan” made for American classroom viewing. How many classrooms it actually screened in is uncertain, since the film had only begun circulating before the Japanese Navy attacked Pearl Harbor. What had been intended as a Western pedagogical film extolling the modern, middle-class familial values of a neighbor along the Pacific Rim quickly became anachronistic amid the war fervor following the aftermath of the attack.

The film persists as an ethnographic relic, uncannily adrift as an artifact ideologically undone as the nations slipped over the threshold from peace to war. The orderly classroom instruction depicted in the film, of students practicing the stroke order for kanji in childish unison, would become a sign of a population conditioned to fascism and then, in the post-war, a symbol of cultural resilience and Japan’s native capacity to adapt Western knowledge into a mysterious Eastern ethos of education and social techniques.

In the present moment, these classrooms persist with children in uniforms and time spent practicing calligraphy, albeit with less certainty as to their efficacy and stability as social and national institutions. The film itself is a global text from an earlier

period, now cut apart and placed into a different circulation of meaning, value, and possibility; a foundational lesson learned from the Dadaists so long ago.

The archival images are uncanny visual echoes to Mami's looped questions. They are laced through my own ethnographic footage, reckoning my yearning for cut-up time, spiraling time, time slipping away and stealing back again. They point to historical ruptures. Together with the present ethnographic they throw us, the viewers, from one instant to the next, one place to the other even as somehow we know—this is the same place. But it isn't. Mami is walking down the steps of the shrine. Mami is calling me to follow her to the back door of her house. "Don't be shy, Dwayne!" Mami shows me how she has broken into her house before by cutting the metal of the back door and reaching in through the jagged hole to flip the latch. She asks if she should do it again, reach in and flip the latch, pretending to be the girl she was when she broke in like a bad kid who forgot her keys. She goes in but offers that I can go around front because it is more proper? I don't know why she tells me this. I say I want to go in the way she went in.

The children in their mundane pre-war routines, filmed so long ago, are a modern shadow of Mami's own globalized trajectory and their images weave together into a film like a skin of another life. Mami goes inside, telling me about the latest mistake in taste her father made when buying her a gift on another business trip. "You can totally tell that's not my style."

With close, familial warmth, the pre-war children go to sleep next to one another while Mt. Fuji is bathed in moonlight. In front of Mami her internet browser snaps open

and she begins quickly typing in her search terms, keywording her way into the digital skin of another life.



Figure 7. Still. *What is this Place Called.* 2010.

Appendix A:

Endless Question: Youth Becomings and the Anti-Crisis of Kids in Global Japan
Scalar-hosted digital text and media content:

<http://scalar.usc.edu/students/endlessquestion/index>

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Biography

Dwayne Emil Dixon was born in Stuttgart, Germany in 1972. He graduated from The College of New Jersey with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1993. He lived in Kitakami, Iwate Prefecture for two years where he taught English in area junior high schools for before returning to the U.S. He began working at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies, coordinating the Literacy Through Photography Program and doing collaborative photography projects with young people across the U.S., Thailand, and China. He has taught extensively, including courses on documentary ethics and practice, visual culture, media and anthropology, experimental ethnographic film, and Japanese popular culture. Dixon has exhibited collaborative photographs and video installations internationally, including the University Art Gallery at the University of San Diego, Whitechapel Gallery, London, and the Istanbul Modern Art Museum, Turkey. His writing has been published in *The Journal of Postmodern Culture*, *Pastelegram*, and is forthcoming in an edited collection on the culture of skateboarding. He skateboards often.